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| Thematic Focus: Xenia – The Sacred Bond Between Host and GuestThematic Focus: Identity |
| **Odysseus Meets Nausicaa*** The *Odyssey*, Book VI, lines 131-203
* Translator: Robert Fagels
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|  “Man of misery, whose land have I lit on now? What are they here—violent, savage, lawless? or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men? Listen: shouting, echoing round me—women, girls— or the nymphs who haunt the rugged mountaintops and the river springs and meadows lush with grass! Or am I really close to people who speak my language? Up with you, see how the land lies, see for yourself now …” Muttering so, great Odysseus crept out of the bushes, stripping off with his massive hand a leafy branch from the tangled olive growth to shield his body, hide his private parts. And out he stalked as a mountain lion exultant in his power strides through wind and rain and his eyes blaze and he charges sheep or oxen or chases wild deer but his hunger drives him on to go for ﬂocks, even to raid the best-defended homestead. So Odysseus moved out … about to mingle with all those lovely girls, naked now as he was, for the need drove him on, a terrible sight, all crusted, caked with brine— they scattered in panic down the jutting beaches. Only Alcinous’ daughter held fast, for Athena planted courage within her heart, dissolved the trembling in her limbs, and she ﬁrmly stood her ground and faced Odysseus, torn now— Should he ﬂing his arms around her knees, the young beauty, plead for help, or stand back, plead with a winning word, beg her to lead him to the town and lend him clothing? This was the better way, he thought. Plead now with a subtle, winning word and stand well back, don’t clasp her knees, the girl might bridle, yes. He launched in at once, endearing, sly and suave: “Here I am at your mercy, princess— are you a goddess or a mortal? If one of the gods who rule the skies up there, you’re Artemis to the life, the daughter of mighty Zeus—I see her now—just look at your build, your bearing, your lithe ﬂowing grace … But if you’re one of the mortals living here on earth, three times blest are your father, your queenly mother, three times over your brothers too. How often their hearts must warm with joy to see you striding into the dances— such a bloom of beauty. True, but he is the one more blest than all other men alive, that man who sways you with gifts and leads you home, his bride! I have never laid eyes on anyone like you, neither man nor woman … I look at you and a sense of wonder takes me. Wait, once I saw the like—in Delos, beside Apollo’s altar— the young slip of a palm-tree springing into the light. There I’d sailed, you see, with a great army in my wake, out on the long campaign that doomed my life to hardship. That vision! Just as I stood there gazing, rapt, for hours … no shaft like that had ever risen up from the earth— so now I marvel at you, my lady: rapt, enthralled, too struck with awe to grasp you by the knees though pain has ground me down. Only yesterday, the twentieth day, did I escape the wine-dark sea. Till then the waves and the rushing gales had swept me on from the island of Ogygia. Now some power has tossed me here, doubtless to suffer still more torments on your shores. I can’t believe they’ll stop. Long before that the gods will give me more, still more. Compassion— princess, please! You, after all that I have suffered, you are the ﬁrst I’ve come to. I know no one else, none in your city, no one in your land. Show me the way to town, give me a rag for cover, just some cloth, some wrapper you carried with you here. And may the good gods give you all your heart desires: husband, and house, and lasting harmony too. No ﬁner, greater gift in the world than that … when man and woman possess their home, two minds, two hearts that work as one. Despair to their enemies, joy to all their friends. Their own best claim to glory.” |